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ABSTRACT

This paper describes research conducted to evaluate a program designed to meet the needs of Asian Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the School District of Philadelphia. The program was the result of a negotiated settlement in a lawsuit filed against the school district in 1985, which alleged that the district was failing to meet the needs of Asian immigrant and refugee children. The settlement resulted in the creation of the Remedial Plan for Asian LEP students, which provided for various curriculum, staff, and program changes to improve the educational opportunity of Asian LEP students. Several studies conducted between 1990 and 1991 have found that: (1) a considerable gap existed between the techniques that teachers of Asian LEP students reported they were using and actual practice; (2) teacher participation in staff development programs could be better supported and funded by the district; and (3) most Asian LEP students felt that mainstream classes with native speakers of English would be more helpful in improving their English skills than sheltered or co-taught classes. Although many changes that benefit both Asian and non-Asian LEP students have taken place, much still needs to be done to make curriculum and staff development programs more effective. (MDM)

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RESEARCH REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW INSTRUCTIONAL MODELS TO SERVICE ASIAN LEP STUDENTS IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEM.

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This paper describes the research conducted to evaluate a program designed to meet the needs of Asian Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the School District of Philadelphia. The program was the result of a negotiated settlement in a lawsuit filed against the School District in 1985. The suit alleged that the School District was failing to meet the needs of Asian immigrant and refugee children, and was failing to provide them and their parents with equal access to the District's programs and services. The negotiated settlement took the form of a Remedial Plan for Asian Limited English Proficient (LEP) students which was finalized in 1988 with the specific goal of meeting these students' needs. The Plan included the following commitments:

1) the establishment of Welcome Centers to test and screen all LEP students for appropriate placement,

2) the development of New Instructional Models which were to be implemented in elementary and secondary schools serving Asian LEP students. These models were to include the establishment of sheltered content area classes at the high school and middle school levels,

3) the development of a new ESOL standardized curriculum,

4) the establishment of a comprehensive staff development program for all levels of personnel who interact with LEP students,

5) the development of a personnel plan to recruit and hire bilingual staff,

6) the addition of an ESOL level (to the three existing ESOL levels) for students who are preliterate in their own language as well as English,

7) the development of special education and vocational education opportunities for LEP students,

8) the establishment of procedures and services for improved bilingual communication with students, parents and community groups, and

9) the development of a plan for systematic research and evaluation of programs and services to LEP students.

The evaluation plan which was subsequently developed consisted of a series of qualitative studies which sought to gain insight into the effect of the New Instructional Models (NIM) Program in meeting LEP students' needs. The NIM program was first piloted between 1988 and 1990 in seven schools, and was administered by the School District's Office of Language Minority Programs. In the 1990-1991 school year, the program was instituted in thirty-two schools which served approximately 3,600 Asian LEP students, as well as other immigrant students. Twenty-two elementary schools, seven high schools and three middle schools became part of the program.

As a result of the negotiated settlement, two Welcome Centers were established in regions with a high concentration of immigrant families. The purpose of these Centers was to test LEP students and to recommend their appropriate ESOL level placement in the schools.

Those students who were pre-literate in both English and in their native language were assigned to Beginning ESOL level 1. This level was added to the three ESOL levels which were already in existence, in an effort to accommodate older students who were arriving in the U.S.A. with little or no prior schooling. All Level 1 students attend ESOL classes daily which provide them with instruction in basic literacy. Level 1 elementary school students also attend mainstream classes, while Level 1 secondary school students attend Orientation to American Culture and Orientation to Mathematics classes for ESOL students, as well as mainstream classes such as Physical Education and Art.

Students assigned to Beginning ESOL Level 2 are those who are literate in their own language but are not proficient in English. While Level 2 elementary school students attend mainstream content classes, Level 2 secondary school students primarily receive content-area instruction in sheltered or co-taught settings. Co-taught classes are conducted by teaching teams comprised of an ESOL teacher and a content-area teacher. Secondary school ESOL Level 2 students receive one less period of ESOL than ESOL Level 1 students and instead receive one more period of content-area instruction.

Intermediate ESOL Level 3 students are those students who have developed some English literacy and proficiency. At the elementary school level, these students have one less ESOL period

daily than students at ESOL Levels 1 and 2. Instead they attend a mainstream English class. At the secondary school level, content-area instruction for Level 3 students is in sheltered settings, but classes in Mathematics, Algebra and Geometry are in a mainstream setting.

Advanced ESOL Level 4 students who are defined as having fairly well developed English literacy and sustained proficiency in English attend one period of ESOL daily and mainstream content-area classes for the rest of the day.

At ESOL Levels 1, 2 and 3, a bilingual instructional support period is also built into the New Instructional Model Program. For this component of the program, bilingual tutors are hired on an hourly basis to assist students in their native language. Most of these tutors are college students, some are high school graduates and some are high school students. ESOL instruction at all levels is guided by the New Standardized ESOL Curriculum which was instituted in 1989. The new curriculum advocates the use of teaching approaches appropriate for use with LEP students, such as Whole Language, Cooperative Learning, Thematic Units and Total Physical Response techniques. The staff development program that the School District instituted as part of the Remedial Agreement has been specifically designed to train teachers in these techniques, and to encourage content-area teachers of sheltered classes to make use of visual aids, hands-on activities and realia.

The research studies discussed in this paper have attempted to assess the innovations described above, with particular attention paid to the secondary school models and how Asian LEP students were faring in sheltered and co-taught classes. To this end, the evaluation team has spent the past three years observing classroom instruction in a large sample of ESOL, sheltered and co-taught classes, and has conducted follow-up interviews with teachers, students and bilingual tutors. Structured observation and interview formats were developed for each study, as were protocols for student focus groups. After the field visits, each evaluator synthesized his/her observation and interview data and then the data were combined, integrated and painstakingly analyzed to tease out the overall findings.

The first study undertaken in 1990-1991 was designed to assess: 1) the use of the new ESOL Standardized Curriculum, 2) the effectiveness of the staff development program being offered to teachers of LEP students, and 3) student perceptions of how ESOL was meeting their needs. With regard to the use of the ESOL Standardized Curriculum, a sample of eleven NIM schools were selected for intensive study. A total of 57 ESOL teachers

at these schools were each observed for two separate 45 minute periods and follow-up interviews were conducted with each teacher. In addition, a survey was sent to all ESOL teachers (N=104) at the thirty-two NIM schools. Focus groups were also run with 11th and 12th grade ESOL 4 students (N=29) to assess their perceptions of how ESOL was meeting their needs. To guage teachers' reactions to the staff development program, focus groups were conducted with a sample of teachers after the staff development sessions and feedback forms which were routinely distributed to all participants were analyzed.

The findings from this study revealed a considerable gap between the techniques teachers reported they were using and actual practice. In practice, most teachers used the content of the ESOL Standardized Curriculum, but while the majority reported in both the survey and interviews that they used the techniques recommended in the curriculum, observation data did not support this. Although most teachers in the observation sample (which represented over 50% of the ESOL teachers in the NIM program) believed they were using the recommended techniques, the findings showed that teachers were often vague or confused about them. For example, teachers who reported using Whole Language in the lessons observed by the evaluators were often, in fact, teaching traditional skills, such as phonics, syntax or grammar lessons. While the majority of teachers in both the survey and the interviews reported using Thematic Units, only seven thematic units were observed in progress during two rounds of observations, i.e. across 114, 45 minute observations. Cooperative Learning to most teachers meant having students work in pairs or groups with very little understanding of the desirability of having teams working together, assigning team member roles, and generating a joint product. Even with the limited definition of Cooperative Learning which the majority of teachers reported using, only 22% of the high school classes, 25% of the middle school classes and 33% of the elementary classes in the sample were observed engaged in paired or group activities.

Student focus groups revealed that the students sampled felt the need for more practice in pronunciation and speaking and felt this could be accomplished through more teacher-to-student and student-to-student interaction. This of course supports the need to introduce Cooperative Learning into ESOL classrooms. In addition, the students seemed to want more intensive practice in all of their language skills.

Before discussing the staff development program which is organized by the Office of Language Minority Programs, it is important to point out that attendance at staff development

sessions is voluntary and is offered to both ESOL and content-area teachers of LEP students after school hours. It became clear that many teachers did not avail themselves on a regular basis of the staff development sessions for which they were compensated. Nevertheless in the 1990-1991 school year, when this study was conducted, 68% of the ESOL teachers had attended at least one of the sessions, all of which were held at a central location. Feedback from the sessions indicated that teachers felt the need for more hands-on training and demonstration lessons.

In order to support instructional changes in NIM schools, the Office of Language Minority Programs incorporated Peer Coaching training into the staff development program. It was planned that teachers would work in pairs helping each other at the school sites to bring about the desired changes in teaching techniques. Again training was voluntary, and 111 teachers (both ESOL and content-area) in NIM schools were trained between March 1990 and March 1991. The evaluation findings from an in-depth study of this component showed that by June 1991, 19 peer coaching teams were functioning in NIM schools, i.e. 34% of the teachers who were trained. By January 1992, this number had dwindled to 9 teams, despite the fact that the Office of Language Minority Programs had instituted a Peer Coaching Leadership Program in the 1991-1992 school year. This program provided the twenty-six volunteer teachers with additional centralized training but no release time at their schools. A survey completed by these teachers showed that the leadership program really did not get off the ground at the school sites. It became clear that the teachers needed more support and follow-up in their schools to enable the program to become operational.

Recommendations generated from the findings of this study and subsequent studies pointed to the need for on-site training, support and follow-up for all teachers (and administrators) of LEP students to bring about the desired changes. It was also recommended that staff development resources be focused on school sites and that the possibility of establishing demonstration schools be considered. To date, attempts are being made to decentralize some of the staff development sessions offered to teachers by providing workshops at regional sites, but no action has been taken regarding the establishment of demonstration sites. The need to provide on-site training, demonstration lessons and on-going staff development support at school sites has begun to be addressed, but requires a great deal more planning and effort to muster the necessary resources.

In sum, wholesale change in teaching methods in a large urban school system characterized by traditional ESOL classrooms

appears to be a long, slow process which can prove very costly. The Philadelphia School District has offered teachers opportunities through paid staff development to update their skills, but has not yet mustered the resources (such as providing on-site trainers or establishing demonstration sites) necessary to effect fundamental change. In addition, it is particularly difficult to effect fundamental changes in teaching methods at the high school level where teachers have been entrenched for years and tend to be the most resistant.

Another study of ESOL instruction in NIM schools focused on the bilingual instructional support period, where bilingual tutors provide assistance to students in their native language. Again a survey of all 32 NIM schools was conducted, as well as in-depth observations, interviews and student focus groups in a sample of eleven schools. While hiring and keeping tutors as well as insuring their regular attendance has posed problems for some schools, most teachers and students viewed this component as helpful. Eighty-five percent of the high school students (N=40) interviewed reported that tutoring increased their understanding of homework assignments and reading materials. Currently a study is underway to determine what can be done to improve the recruitment and hiring process.

As mentioned earlier, much of the research has focused on the secondary school New Instructional Models, in particular, on how sheltered and co-taught content-area classes are meeting the needs of Asian LEP students. The first study undertaken in this area in 1990-1991, was designed to assess: 1) the staff development provided to teachers of sheltered and co-taught classes, 2) the extent to which teachers diversified their instructional strategies to meet the needs of LEP students, 3) student perceptions of how these classes were meeting their needs, and 4) student performance in sheltered and co-taught classes at all ten secondary schools as measured by end-of-year report card marks.

Staff development sessions offered to content-area teachers were often the same sessions offered to ESOL teachers, i.e. at a central location, after school hours, on a paid, voluntary basis. In the 1990-1991 school year, 42% of the forty-eight content-area teachers in the ten New Insructional Model Secondary schools attended at least one of the staff development sessions. A consistent finding has been that fewer content-area teachers than ESOL teachers avail themselves of the staff development offered. Feedback from the content-area teachers who did attend the sessions indicated that they wanted more help in developing and applying appropriate teaching strategies to specific content areas, and that they needed help with instructional materials.

To assess how teachers of sheltered and co-taught classes diversified their instructional strategies to meet the needs of LEP students, seven of the ten secondary NIM schools were selected for in-depth study. Twenty sheltered class teachers and twelve co-taught class teams in these seven schools were observed and interviewed. The findings showed that most teachers in the sample made language modifications and modifications in materials to meet the needs of LEP students. However, few teachers were observed employing visual aids, engaging students in hands-on activities or using cooperative learning techniques. These have all been recommended as ways of making instruction more comprehensible to LEP students. Teachers in the sample expressed concern over the lack of appropriate content-area texts and materials for LEP students and the need for staff development tailored to their needs. At some high schools they also expressed concern about the large size of the sheltered classes.

Research regarding the co-taught teams showed that while the three middle school teams in the sample felt that their collaboration was effective, two thirds of the high school teams (N=9) expressed dissatisfaction with the arrangement. This was often because the ESOL teacher had little input. Again the findings from this study pointed to the need for on-site staff development for content-area teachers (and ESOL teachers) to help them apply appropriate teaching strategies and to build more effective co-teaching teams.

In another phase of this study, student perceptions of sheltered and co-taught classes were assessed, and an analysis of end-of-year report card marks was conducted. A total of 247 (62%) ESOL Level 2 and 3 students at the seven secondary schools in the sample were interviewed in focus groups (each consisting of five or six students). While the vast majority of students in sheltered and co-taught classes received passing end-of-year marks in all content-area subjects, most students in the sample expressed concern about their English skills. The most surprising finding was that 79% to 85% of the students interviewed believed that classes with native English speakers would be more helpful in improving their English skills than sheltered or co-taught classes. In addition, students expressed a desire to make American friends and learn more about Americans and American ways.

Advocates of these students have tended to interpret these findings as a desire on the part of the students to be more closely linked to the mainstream culture. However, they do not believe that students at these ESOL levels would be better off in mainstream classes. The evaluation team has argued that although this may be true, more opportunities need to be built into the

New Instructional Models Secondary Program for LEP students to work closely with mainstream students.

In an effort to gain more understanding of what was happening to students in sheltered classrooms and to compare the sheltered class experience with the mainstream class experience, another major study was undertaken in the 1991-1992 school year. This study had three phases: 1) the first phase of the study involved conducting focus group interviews with 114 ESOL Level 4 middle and high school students to assess whether their perceptions of sheltered classes had changed now that they were in mainstream classes, 2) the second phase of the study sought to compare sheltered and mainstream instruction. Extended observations and interviews were conducted with ten teachers in four of the larger NIM high schools. These were teachers who taught the same content-area subject in both a mainstream setting and a sheltered setting, and 3) the third phase of the study involved conducting case studies of a sample of 57 Asian LEP students who attended these ten sheltered classes.

The findings from the first phase of the study, the ESOL Level 4 student focus groups, supported the earlier findings, i.e. the majority of students in the sample indicated that they would have preferred taking mainstream classes instead of sheltered classes when they were in ESOL Level 3. Students reported that they felt their English was improving now that they were in mainstream classes, and that there had also been improvements in the way Asians and non-Asians mixed. Despite these improvements, 43% of the high school students in the sample reported that they did not work with non-Asian students in mainstream classes, and were less than enthusiastic about their relationships with non-Asian students, citing a number of problems such as language difficulties, cultural differences and discourteous treatment by non-Asian students. These difficulties notwithstanding, the overwhelming majority of students still expressed a desire to interact more with non-Asian students.

The second phase of this study concentrated on ten high school content-area teachers who taught both mainstream and sheltered classes. The evaluation staff observed each teacher for two full periods on two consecutive days in both the mainstream and sheltered classes and then returned for two more days of consecutive observations in each class a week or two later. A follow-up interview was conducted with each teacher. The findings from this phase of the study revealed that sheltered class students in the sample received essentially the same curriculum as their mainstream counterparts regardless of subject. Some interesting differences emerged by school. At two

of the schools in the sample, teachers taught both the sheltered classes and mainstream classes competently. At the third school, teachers taught the sheltered classes competently but interacted minimally with the mainstream classes. At the largest high school in the sample, three of the five teachers were observed using lecture or textbook dependent methods in both sheltered and mainstream classes, and student oral participation was minimal with all five teachers.

Of the ten teachers in the study, seven consistently modified their teaching to accommodate the needs of LEP students, but few of these teachers were observed employing visual aids, props or audiovisual equipment. Even fewer engaged students in hands-on activities or cooperative learning. These findings are consistent with the findings of the earlier study of sheltered classes.

The third phase of this study, case studies of 57 Asian LEP students who attended the sheltered classes described above, involved : 1) a search of school records and computerized files to obtain background information on the students, so that a mix of high, middle and low performing students could be selected from a variety of Asian countries, 2) following each student through an entire school day, and recording each student's behavior and experiences, 3) conducting follow-up interviews with each student, and 4) conducting interviews with each student's teachers. Although all the necessary field work for the case studies has been completed, the analysis of the data is still underway. Preliminary findings, however, show that many of these students (ESOL Levels 2 and 3) are struggling to cope with the work in sheltered classes due to language and educational deficits, and indeed could not have handled mainstream classes.

CONCLUSIONS:

Many changes which benefit both Asian and non-Asian LEP students have taken place as a result of the negotiated settlement. These changes include : 1) the establishment of two Welcome Centers which has benefited all ESOL students in the district by making more timely ESOL placement possible, 2) the addition of Beginning ESOL classes for preliterate immigrant students has been instituted district-wide, as has the new ESOL Standardized Curriculum. At the very least, the new curriculum guide has heightened teacher awareness of the techniques which are appropriate for use with LEP students, as has the staff development program which is offered to all ESOL teachers in the district who choose to take advantage of it, 3) the introduction

of bilingual tutors at the 32 New Instructional Model schools which involved not only the hiring of Asian tutors but also tutors who speak the languages of non-Asian LEP students, 4) translating communications to all parents of LEP students in the School District into the appropriate languages, and 5) hiring not only Asian bilingual counseling assistants who are supervised by the school counselor at New Instructional Model Schools to improve communications between students, parents and school staff, but also hiring bilingual counseling assistants for schools with large Russian populations.

The settlement has also prompted the School District to intensify its efforts to appoint Asian teachers, and to provide Asian students with more vocational and special education opportunities. Last, but not least, the establishment of sheltered and co-taught classes at New Instructional Model Secondary Schools has made learning more manageable for students who would otherwise be lost in mainstream settings. This is particularly true for those students who have missed several years of schooling in their own country.

On the other hand, much still needs to be done to make ESOL and sheltered instruction more effective through more intensive efforts to change teacher behavior. Centralized staff development only reaches the tip of the iceberg. Wide-sweeping changes must involve administrators and all teachers who deal with LEP students and requires on-going staff development at school sites. Most importantly, while sheltered instruction is conducive to meeting the needs of Asian LEP students, it tends to isolate them from mainstream students. Even when Asian LEP and mainstream students are present in the same class, as was noted in the ESOL Level 4 student focus group findings, unless teachers make planned efforts to have students interact, many students do not get a chance to work with each other. Modifications which facilitate the interaction of LEP students with mainstream students and require their teachers to work together are needed. For example, instituting a peer tutoring program between mainstream and LEP students or setting up joint projects between sheltered class and mainstream students are two possibilities. Heightening cultural sensitivity and mutual understanding cannot be accomplished without planned efforts to achieve them.

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The reports listed below were produced by the ESOL/Bilingual Evaluation Unit, Office of Assessment, School District of Philadelphia:

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2. An Assessment of Peer Coaching Training and Practice in New Instructional Model Schools. Report #9203, August 1991. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 343 893)

3. A Study of the Bilingual Instructional Support Component in New Instructional Model Schools. Report #9119, June 1991. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 344 958)

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